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Open up

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Despite a growing backlash, the boom in migration has been mostly good for both sending and recipient countries, says Adam Roberts (interviewed [here](#))



ENOCH POWELL had a point. The Conservative British politician gave warning, nearly four decades ago, that immigrants were causing such strife that “like the Roman, I seem to see the River Tiber foaming with much blood.” That proved to be nonsense, as did his advice that migrants should be encouraged to leave. Had they done so, Britain and other rich countries that depend heavily on foreign labour would be in a dreadful state. But one prediction he made was spot on: that by about now, one in ten people in Britain would be migrants. And indeed, at the last count in 2005, the foreign-born made up 9.7% of the British population.

By historical standards, that is high. It is a lot more than a decade ago, and the trend is resolutely upwards. Yet it is not dissimilar to that in many other rich countries, which have mostly seen equally rapid increases. And it is still lower than in America, where the proportion is now about 13%, not far off the 15% peak reached just before the first world war, in the previous great era of migration. What is particularly striking in Europe is that many countries which until recently had known only emigration, such as Ireland or Greece, are now seeing the sort of influx more typical of countries such as Australia and America.

This special report will argue that both emigration and immigration countries, as well as the migrants themselves, have been coping remarkably well with this new force that is reshaping our world. Yet there are now signs of a serious backlash against immigration on both sides of the Atlantic. In 2007 activists in America smashed a bill to make immigration easier that had the backing of the president and the leaders of both big parties in Congress. In France, Nicolas Sarkozy won the presidential elections partly thanks to his anti-migrant rhetoric. But this is still a far cry from Mr Powell's doom-mongering.

Politicians in rich countries may tinker with migration policies. They will certainly, under public pressure, put extra resources and energy into building more fences and walls to keep people out. And by making a connection between immigration and terrorism, they may cause their societies to become more heavily policed. But the basic forces driving migration are unlikely to ebb.

Counting the ways

People who cross international borders are often categorised by their motives, and some of these categories are seen as less desirable than others. Most migrants move for economic reasons, many in search of jobs, some to be united with relatives. Most appear to be doing so legally. America in 2002-06 allowed in an average of just over 1m legal immigrants a year who planned to settle permanently, more than half of them sponsored by relatives. Another 320,000 a year entered temporarily.

The number of illegal migrants is by definition hard to ascertain, but likely to be smaller than the legal sort. The illegals also go for economic reasons, and they probably make up the bulk of people seen floating on rafts in the Mediterranean or scrabbling over the fence from Mexico to America. Many illegal migrants do not risk the high seas or physical borders but instead enter under some other guise, perhaps as tourists, and then stay on. In that same period of 2002-06, America's population is thought to have seen a net gain of 500,000 illegal migrants every year. Within the European Union it has become impossible to keep a tally because people can move legally among most of the member countries without asking anyone. Britain, as an island, should find it easier than most to know how many foreigners it has allowed in, but its statistics on migrants have recently turned out to be way off the mark.

Lastly, there are refugees and asylum-seekers, strictly defined as those escaping persecution but often including anybody forced to flee, for example from a war. According to the UN's refugee agency, at the close of 2006 some 10m people fell into this category. Many go through legal channels, applying for refugee status and then asylum. But others join illegal migrants in trying to reach host countries by raft or by jumping over a fence. Genuine refugees may have no alternative.

The 200m question

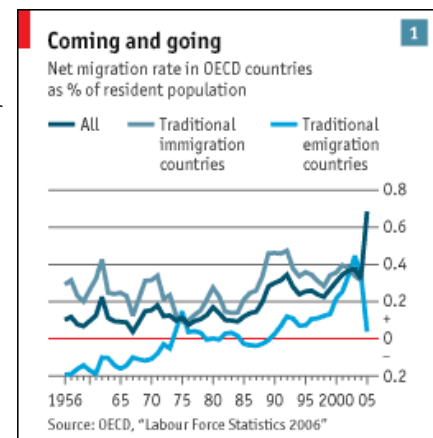
The number of migrants in the world today, both legal and illegal, is thought to total perhaps 200m (though many of the figures, even those used by governments, are at best educated guesses). That sounds a lot, but it adds up to only 3% of the world's population, so there is great potential for growth. Migration has turned out to be a successful strategy for the world's poor to make their lives a little better. Nor is it the very poorest who travel. You need money to move to another part of the world. Thus as Africa, China and other emerging countries become less poor, many more people can aspire to travel in search of a better life.

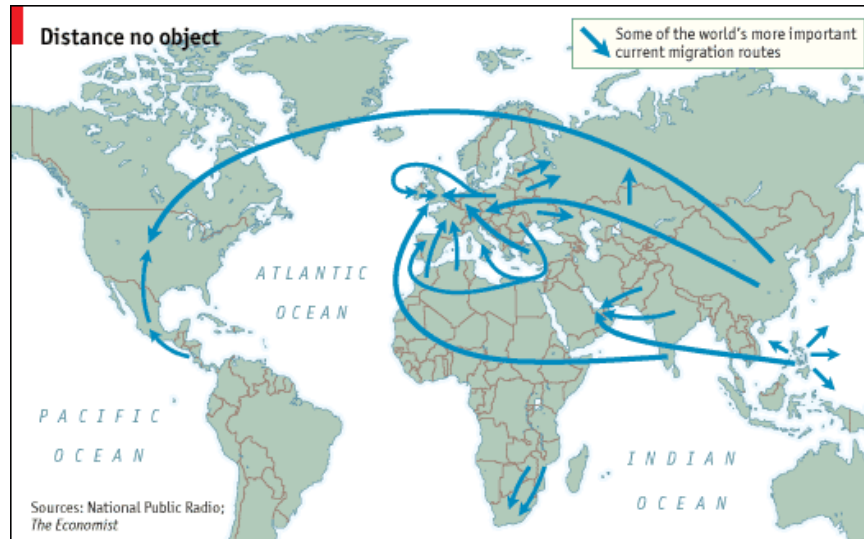
In the 100 years to 1920, such prospects encouraged some 60m Europeans to uproot themselves and move to the New World. A European who crossed the Atlantic could expect to double his income. Today the incentives are even more enticing. Those who move from a poor country to a rich one can expect to see their income rise fivefold or more. As long as such differentials persist, the draw will continue.

These days, too, demography is playing a big part in migration. Not every migrant is aiming for America or Europe: perhaps two in every five move to another poor or middle-income country. But those who go to the richest parts of the world do their inhabitants a favour. Without migrants, the greying and increasingly choosy populations in much of the rich world would already be on the decline today. That matters for their fast-changing economies, which increasingly demand either highly skilled workers or people willing to do unpleasant and tiring jobs.

One reason why much of the world has enjoyed a sustained economic boom with low inflation in the past decade is that the effective global workforce is expanding so fast. The IMF says it has quadrupled since 1980 as China and India have plugged their huge young populations into the world economy. It is likely to keep on growing, though at a slower pace, with a 40% increase in the world's working-age population forecast by 2050. According to the UN, the global stock of migrants has more than doubled in the past four decades. Not enough young natives have the right skills or motivation, so the rich must hope that outsiders will keep coming.

And they will. Luckily for Europe and America, there are huge pools of eager workers ready to jump on the next plane, train or leaking raft to work abroad. This can be beneficial for their home countries as well, at least as long as the population is growing fast. The IMF says that emigration from Belize, El Salvador, Guyana and Jamaica, for example, may have led to higher wages and less poverty. Some Chinese from the heavily populated east coast are moving out, despite a fast-growing economy. Researchers in Africa report a recent rapid inflow of Chinese workers.





If exporting brawn generally makes sense for a poor country, sending its better brains away may not. Most, perhaps all, poor and middle-income countries face chronic shortages of skilled workers. In South Africa, although universities churn out graduates at a fast clip, many well-qualified people promptly depart for Britain or Australia, leaving tens of thousands of jobs unfilled at home. In Morocco those with science and engineering degrees, computer skills and languages go to France, the Netherlands and Canada, whereas the students of literature and public administration stay at home. Professor Mohamed Khachami, of AMERM, a migration think-tank in Rabat, laments that his country lacks people to build better internet connections, yet Paris now has an association for Moroccan IT engineers. Hospitals and clinics in southern Africa struggle to cope with huge public-health problems as doctors and nurses pack their bags for jobs in the Gulf, Europe and elsewhere. It is a similar story for schools.

Those in demand abroad are the hardest people to keep at home. Some European countries tried, and failed, to stop artisans emigrating to America in the early 19th century. In fact it is almost impossible to block the exit for the highly skilled if the lure is strong enough. Small countries such as Jamaica, Trinidad and Senegal have seen half to three-quarters of all their graduates move abroad.

Rich countries have taken in more highly skilled migrants than ever before. The World Bank looked at a sample drawn from 52m migrants in 20 rich countries in 2000 and found that 36% of them had a college education, a sharp rise on a decade earlier. Yet emigration of skilled workers may be a consequence rather than a cause of problems in the sending country. For example, nurses may be quitting Malawi because their salaries are not being paid or because hospitals are crumbling; entrepreneurs may be moving abroad because the business climate back home is wretched. Stopping emigration, even if you could, would not solve the problems. The nurses might still leave their jobs, the would-be entrepreneur might sit on his hands.

Indeed, some argue that emigration can help to add to the stock of brainpower. Migrants who go abroad may spend more time studying, pick up more skills and experience and then bring them all home again. Remittances are often used to fund schooling. And the prospect of emigration and prosperity abroad may be an inducement for many more to get an education. All this suggests that the consequences of skilled emigration are difficult to calculate, even if they are not negligible.

Governments of sending countries would do well to tackle whatever factors are pushing their skilled people out in the first place. Malawi, which exports a lot of nurses, should of course worry that it lacks medical staff. It is said that there are more Malawian nurses in Manchester than back home. But, perhaps with donors' help, more investment in public health could be combined with a strategy of training many more nurses than are needed, allowing for future emigration and the other benefits that brings. If migrants can be tempted back home, even for short spells, all the better. Ghana, for example, has raised wages for some medical staff and offered incentives to the highest-skilled to come back. Money is not the only concern: staff are also allowed parts of the year to work abroad, giving a boost to their careers.

There is no guarantee that migration will carry on at record rates. It is possible to seal borders tightly enough to keep more people out if those inside are ready to pay the price. An earlier period of great migration came to

an end, for example, when America some 90 years ago shut its doors to immigrants for a while.

But easier movement of capital and goods has helped to make the world a much richer place in the past decade or two, and more human mobility has both created wealth and helped to share it out more equally. The billions sent around the world in remittances each year is testimony to that. The price of keeping people out would be high.

And unexpected things keep happening. Wars can suddenly displace millions of people who may start off as refugees but end up as migrants. Some people think that climate change might force tens of millions of people to get moving within just a few decades. Misguided policies, a backlash over terrorism or a failure to integrate migrants could all cause serious problems. All the same, it seems clear, 40 years on, that Mr Powell got everything but his sums completely wrong.